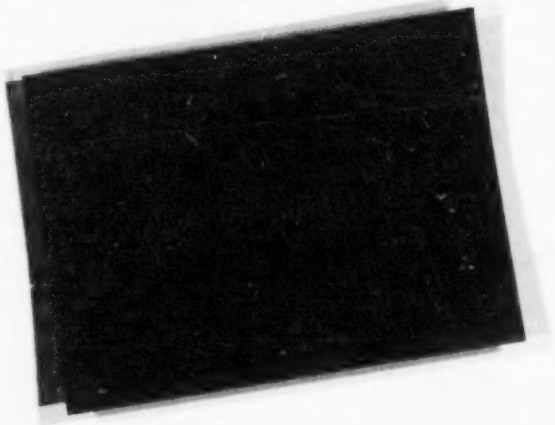
The Role of the Secretary-General

by U Thant

and the Concluding Remarks of the "Introduction to the Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization"



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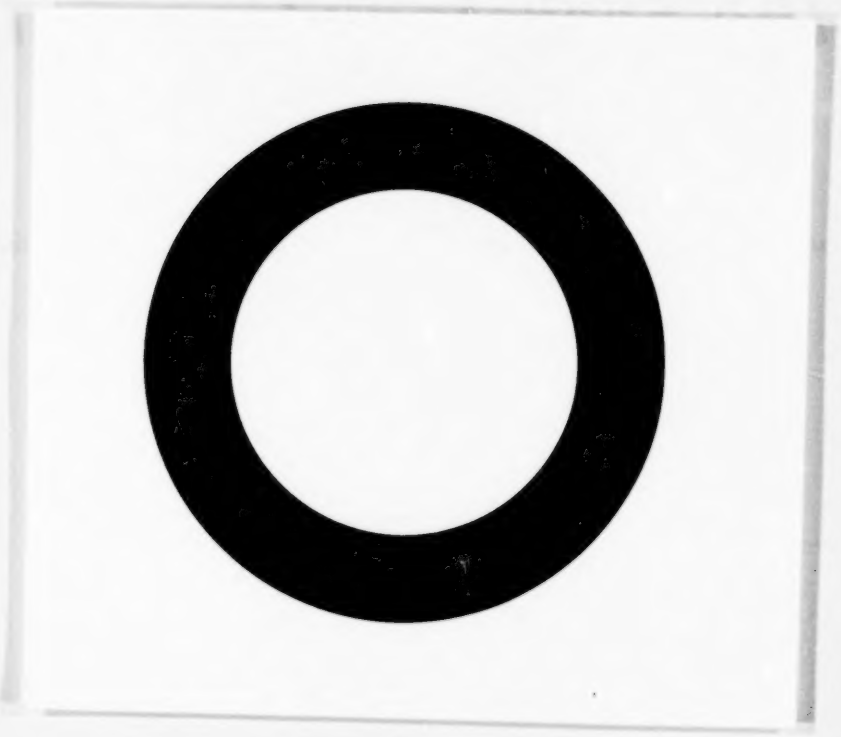

The Role of the Secretary-General

Following is the text of the address delivered by the Secretary-General, U Thant, at the annual luncheon of the Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Scholarship Fund of the United Nations Correspondents Association held on 16 September 1971. Attached to it are the Concluding Remarks of the Introduction to the Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization.

I welcome this opportunity to be with so many old friends from the United Nations Correspondents Association just before we embark on the turbulent waters of another session of the General Assembly. I hope you will understand why I wished, on this occasion, to make a rather longer and more formal speech than usual. I would like also to take this opportunity to express to you my gratitude and appreciation for all the courtesy, friendship and co-operation which I have received from the members of the Press corps here at the United Nations in my 10 years as Secretary-General. The Press and the media play an incalculably important role in our affairs, and, I may add, in the daily life of the Secretary-General. I would be the first to recognize that our relationship, in the very nature of things, cannot always be an easy one. Your duty is to find out and report news—mine, often to my regret, is usually to be discreet, sometimes to the point of total silence. I therefore appreciate all the more the understanding and comradeship you have shown me in my years as Secretary-General.

Ten years ago tomorrow, Dag Hammarskjöld died in Africa. In his eight years at the United Nations, he gave the Office of the Secretary-General a new meaning and a new place in international life. He died at the height of a controversy over the nature and function of the United Nations as a political organization and over the role of the Secretary-General—a controversy which is still by no means resolved. Today, I shall speak of the role of the Secretary-General as it appears to me, 10 years after Hammarskjöld's death and in the light of my own experiences as his successor.

Hammarskjöld brought to the Office of the Secretary-General the gifts of a scholar, a visionary, and of a man of great practical experience in public affairs. He deployed these gifts with energy and realism in his work as Secretary-General, using the challenges and opportunities of international life to develop the potential of the United Nations as an instrument of multilateral diplomacy. He was a diplomat of extraordinary skill and perception, as well as an indefatigable and resourceful negotiator. All his work was based on a thorough and penetrating study of the problems he faced and on a deep insight into the difficulties of those he was dealing with. His mastery of political matters, law and economics, which he had first gained in academic life, was constantly tested and en-

hanced by practical application. He had an unequalled intellectual grasp of the complexities of international affairs and of the United Nations as an embryonic system of world order.

These great gifts were complemented by human qualities which gave Dag Hammarskjöld an extraordinary stature in the world. He felt a sense of total vocation in the Secretary-Generalship and devoted all of his strength and skill to its problems. Although he was anything but a moralist and disliked moral judgements on public matters, he had an unshakeable integrity and a clear and determined view of what was right. He knew that in public life there is no substitute for individual courage and conviction, and he demanded of himself far more than he expected of others. Though sensitive to public opinion and criticism, he steadfastly refused to compromise his principles for the sake of popularity.

Some of the human qualities which gave Hammarskjöld his exceptional position in the world shine through a passage in "Markings", published after his death, in which he sets out some rules for those engaged in the pursuit of peace. These rules remain valid for all of us who work in the United Nations and in the struggle for a better world.

"It is more important," Hammarskjöld wrote, "to be aware of the grounds for your own behavior than to understand the motives of another.

"The other's 'face' is more important than your own.

"If, while pleading another's cause, you are at the same time seeking something for yourself, you cannot hope to succeed.

"You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learned to see the other objectively, but, at the same time, to experience his difficulties subjectively.

"The man who 'likes people' disposes once and for all of the man who despises them.

"All first-hand experience is valuable, and he who has given up looking for it will one day find that he lacks what he needs: a closed mind is a weakness, and he who approaches persons or painting or poetry without the youthful ambition to learn a new language and so gain access to someone else's perspective of life, let him beware.

"A successful lie is doubly a lie, an error which has to be corrected is a heavier burden than truth: only an uncompromising 'honesty' can reach the bedrock of decency which you should always expect to find, even under deep layers of evil.

"Diplomatic 'finesse' must never be another word for fear of being unpopular: that is to seek the appearance of influence at the cost of its reality."

Every Secretary-General brings to the Office his own personality, ideas and methods. The efforts and experiences, achievements and failures, of successive Secretaries-General are the raw materials out of which the Office has developed over the years on the basis of the very general description which is given in the Charter. While the fundamental objectives of the Charter remain, circumstances change, new opportunities for development present themselves—and sometimes new obstacles appear. Things that were possible for one Secretary-General are no longer possible for his successor, and vice versa. There are times when action, dynamism and innovation are in demand, and other times when Governments shun them like the plague. The Office is, of necessity, devel-

oped through trial and error and in response to the demands and challenges of the passing years. Each Secretary-General must build as best he can on the Office as he inherited it. If he cannot hope to repeat all the successes of his predecessors, neither should be fear to try again where they failed.

No Secretary-General can afford to lose a sense of obligation to the human community in its broadest sense—an obligation to give his utmost to make the principles and aims of the Charter a reality and to do whatever he can to improve the general condition of the community of nations. Hammarskjöld never lost for a moment this sense of obligation, and I myself have regarded it, during my 10 years in office, as the primary rule which nothing can be allowed to obscure. While it is debatable whether the Secretary-General is—or should try to be—the conscience of mankind, he must certainly never lose a strong personal sense of justice, of humanity, and of the importance of human dignity.

The other quality which a Secretary-General can never afford to lose is an urgent sense of political realism. The Secretary-General operates under the Charter in a world of independent sovereign States, where national interests remain dominant despite ideological, technological and scientific changes, and despite the obvious dangers of unbridled nationalism. He works within the paradox that as these sovereign States in fact become increasingly interdependent, the forces of nationalism often lead them to assert more and more stridently their rivalries with each other.

These are the two poles of the Secretary-General's world—at one extreme the idealism and the global objectives of the Charter; at the other the pragmatic, and on occasion downright selfish, nature of national sovereignty. Working between these two poles, the Secretary-General cannot afford to lose touch with either. This is, I suspect, the reason why the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, in a moment of understandable exasperation, once called the Secretary-Generalship "the most impossible job in the world". Although I do not agree with his assessment, I can easily understand what he meant.

In every critical situation, the Secretary-General's activity will seem to some Governments to be too much and to others too little. He must thread his way through the jungle of conflicting national policies with the Charter as his compass, and, if he is lucky, with a directive from one of the main deliberative organs as his guide. Even if such a directive exists, it is unlikely to insure him against governmental objections to his actions, for the most explicit and straightforward resolution on a controversial matter will inevitably contain compromises, silences and ambiguities which the organ concerned is unlikely to wish to elucidate. In such situations, there is often a large difference between what some Governments wish the Secretary-General to do, or not to do, and what other Governments and public opinion expect of him. While he has a general obligation to act in accordance with the principles of the Charter, to act effectively he must also work with and through sovereign Governments. The luxury of judgements and moral declarations, so freely engaged in by national politicians and by the Press in troubled times, must be forsworn by the Secretary-General if he is to maintain that degree of co-operation from Governments through which alone he may be able eventually to get some results. And when he refuses to make public moral judgements, he will be widely accused of callousness, insensibility and worse. National sovereignty and national interest, humanitarian considerations, governmental susceptibilities and the principles of the Charter form

the elements of an insoluble equation, which nonetheless the Secretary-General must continually, and in all sorts of situations, attempt to solve. I think this is what Trygve Lie had in mind.

There is a persistent illusion that the Secretary-General's position is in some way comparable to that of the head of a Government, and that clear-cut and decisive action can, and should be, taken by him on problems which have defied the collective wisdom of the 127 Member Governments. The truth, of course, is that the United Nations, and the Secretary-General, have none of the attributes of sovereignty, and no independent power although the Secretary-General has, and must maintain, his independence of judgement, and must never become the agent of any particular Government or group of Governments. No parliament enacts for the Secretary-General the detailed and enforceable legislation which provides a Prime Minister with precise and continuous directives. No clear-cut policy illuminates his course of action. He is supported by none of the great permanent establishments of a State, and lacks the first-hand sources of information upon which Governments can base their plans. More often than not he faces the conflicts of the present or the problems of the future with vague or non-existent directives, with an exiguous budget, and, in the case of some peace-keeping operations or of vast relief problems, with resources based solely on voluntary contributions. These are some of the limitations of the Secretary-Generalship.

The constitutional basis for the role of the Secretary-General is contained in five short articles of the Charter—Articles 97-101. Article 97 establishes the Secretary-General as Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization. This in itself is more than a full-time job. It is sometimes overlooked that the United Nations which is intended to deal with the problems of sovereign Governments, many of which are centuries old, itself started from scratch only 26 years ago. To build a truly international civil service and to maintain the requisite balance between efficiency, competence and integrity, on the one hand, and equitable geographical distribution on the other, is in itself a tremendous challenge. To attend to the myriad administrative and political details involved and to make a complex and embryonic international civil service system actually work in the context of the day-to-day, world-wide political and other developments is heavy and time-consuming work. Like my predecessors, I have constantly had cause to regret that other pressures leave the Secretary-General far too little time for a task which in the long run will have a decisive effect on the successful development and performance of the Organization.

While there has been real progress in establishing the nucleus of a truly international civil service in the Secretariat, an immense amount remains to be done. Such a service, to be fully effective, must also be fully accepted by Governments, and here progress is disappointing and slow. In some respects, in fact, there have been setbacks in the past few years and the spirit of internationalism has tended to be in retreat before the forces of nationalism. Questions of nationality, and governmental suspicions about the objectivity of Secretariat members in particular situations, however unjustified, all to often make it impossible to use the existing staff to its full potential. I hope the day will soon come when *all* members of the Secretariat whatever their country of origin, are equally accepted in *all* situations as the impartial and objective officials which the Charter and their oath of office require them to be. Even 50 years ago, at the inception of the League of Nations, it was soon recognized that a Secretariat

composed entirely of seconded national officials would not satisfactorily meet the challenges of international problems. Whatever the difficulties, I am more than ever convinced of the basic and urgent necessity for the creation and acceptance of a truly international civil service if our Organization is to be able to meet the demands of the future, whether in the political, economic, social or technological sphere. I believe that very serious thought should be given to new methods of helping the Secretary-General to fulfil his responsibilities in this fundamental task.

Article 98 is the first of two articles setting out the political responsibilities of the Secretary-General. This is a radical departure from the non-political concept of the Secretary-Generalship to be found in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 98, by providing that the Security Council, the General Assembly and the other main organs may entrust the Secretary-General with unspecified "other functions", has brought him—and the Secretariat—into the arena of political conflict. As I said just now, even the most apparently straightforward resolution often contains ambiguities and compromises, and most resolutions on controversial subjects could not have been passed without such twilight areas. Thus, the Secretary-General often finds himself faced with the necessity of taking actions under Article 98 which will be disliked or contested by one Government or another. His only guide here is his judgement as to the intentions of the majority which voted the resolution, his application of the principles of the Charter to the situation at hand and the confidence that his integrity will be respected even if his conclusions are disputed. I count myself fortunate that, in my 10 years, as Secretary-General, the many Governments who have at one time or another disagreed with my interpretations of, or actions on, the decisions of the main organs have also recognized my obligation to discharge my duty as I see it.

I feel strongly that the Secretary-General, irrespective of his personal views on any issue, is obliged to stand by every resolution or decision of the main deliberative organs of the United Nations. As I have said many times, the United Nations will not become the effective instrument its founders intended it to be until its Members abide by its rules and give real attention to its decisions and resolutions. This is especially true in the most complex and difficult situations, such as the Middle East problem, where the failure to reach a solution is not so much the failure of the United Nations to take decisions as the failure of its Members to abide by those decisions. The Secretary-General has no option whatsoever in this regard, whatever may be the temporary effect on his relations with individual Member States. Nor can he seek an escape from a resolution of an organ of the United Nations because it may appear to be unpractical or even unfair. The Organization can only mature and develop a sense of responsibility through experience and co-operation in collective decision-making. Mistakes and false starts are an inevitable part of this process. The correction of such mistakes is another essential part of the process, which hitherto has not figured large in the activities of the United Nations.

It is Article 99 of the Charter which gives the Secretary-General explicit political responsibility in his own right. The Preparatory Commission of the United Nations elaborated on Article 99 in its report as follows:

> "The Secretary-General may have an important role to play as a mediator and as an informal adviser of many Governments, and will undoubtedly be called

upon from time to time, in the exercise of his administrative duties, to take decisions which may justly be called political. Under Article 99 of the Charter, moreover, he has been given a quite special right which goes beyond any power previously accorded to the head of an international organization, viz, to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter (not merely any dispute or situation) which, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. It is impossible to foresee how this Article will be applied; but the responsibility it confers upon the Secretary-General will require the exercise of the highest qualities of political judgement, tact and integrity."

This is virtually the only official guidance available to the Secretary-General on the implications of Article 99, which, surprisingly enough, was adopted with very little debate at San Francisco. The right to bring matters to the attention of the Security Council implies a watching brief and a broad discretion to conduct inquiries and to engage in informal diplomatic activity in regard to matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security. Article 33, which enjoins parties to any dispute to seek a solution by peaceful means of their own choice, is also relevant to the Secretary-General's duty under Article 99.

Article 99 is both far-reaching and vague. It has been specifically invoked only once, when Hammarskjöld used it to call the Security Council into session over the Congo, but its implications are central to the day-to-day political functioning of the Secretary-General. In December 1966, when the Security Council requested me to continue as Secretary-General, the President informed me that the members of the Council "fully respected the Secretary-General's position and his action in bringing basic issues confronting the Organization and disturbing developments to their notice". I have continued to act in accordance with my interpretation of Article 99 as reinforced by this statement, most recently in my Memorandum to the President of the Council concerning the situation in East Pakistan and the adjacent Indian States. Although there is a difference of opinion as to the Secretary-General's rights to take independent initiatives, Article 99 leaves no doubt that any potential threat to peace and security must be of concern to him, and that he has a duty to do what he can to mitigate it.

There are, of course, many ways of fulfilling the wide but imprecise responsibilities of the Secretary-General under Article 99. These responsibilities must be seen in the broader context of the nature of the Secretary-Generalship as it has developed over the years. In the early stages of drafting the Charter, President Roosevelt suggested that the Chief Officer of the United Nations should be called the "Moderator", and I know of no better single word to describe my own idea of the Office. I have always felt that the most important political duty of the Secretary-General was to concentrate on the harmonizing functions of the United Nations as set out in Article 1 (4) of the Charter. I have tried to use my Office, with all the discretion that the importance of the task requires, to allay unnecessary fears and suspicions, to establish communication between conflicting parties and to do whatever I could to bridge the gulf between East and West. With this end in view, I have been at pains to understand, and to remain on co-operative terms with all the Governments concerned, even when, as often happens, an easier and more popular course might be to take sides and make public judgements. I would hope that when

the full record can be written, this continuous and discreet activity may prove to have made some contribution to international peace and understanding in our time.

I have never had any doubt that the Secretary-General, with Article 33 in mind, must exercise his good offices in the settlement of disputes or difficulties, even without specific authorization from the Security Council or another organ of the United Nations, when the States concerned request it. As I was obliged to point out to the President of the Security Council over the case of Equatorial Guinea in March 1969, my informing him of my intention to send a representative to that country at the request of the Governments concerned was in no sense a consultation, and I was merely following the previously established practice of taking action and keeping the Security Council informed of what I was doing.

The exercise of good offices has proved on occasion to be a useful method of preventing differences between States from developing into major crisis and of getting results on sensitive problems before they reach the insoluble stage. Preventive diplomacy of this kind is far more effective—and incidentally much cheaper—than attempting to cure a conflict which has been allowed to reach an acute stage. It requires total discretion and the co-operation, restraint and goodwill of the parties concerned. It also requires from them courage and vision, as well as confidence in the discretion and integrity of the Secretary-General. When these conditions are present, much can be done quietly. The settlement of the question of Bahrain, whose application for membership was recently unanimously approved by the Security Council, is a case in point.

Much of the Secretary-General's time is spent in attempts to exercise good offices in one form or another, and the less publicity there is during or after these efforts, the more successful they are likely to be. Scarcely a day passes without appeals to the Secretary-General for help from some corner of the world. These appeals range from approaches from Goverments for assistance in adjusting difficulties with other Governments through requests for help from minority groups, to calls from individuals in an infinite variety of dilemmas. Sometimes the Secretary-General can help, and sometimes he must frankly state that he cannot, because in his judgement his intervention will be ineffective, or even positively harmful, or perhaps outside the scope of his functions under the Charter.

In the last 10 years I have also offered my good offices in situations which seemed to me to be so serious as to require me to do so even without a specific request from the parties. I did this in the Cuban missiles crisis, for example, and on a number of occasions such as over Viet-Nam, as well as in the Nigerian civil war.

This quiet method of forestalling conflict seems to me to be a part of the Secretary-General's role which should be continuously developed as an alternative to the specific—and much more dramatic—invocation of Article 99. There are good reasons why Article 99 has been specifically invoked only once. Nothing could be more divisive and useless than for the Secretary-General to bring a situation publicly to the Security Council when there is no practical possibility of the Council agreeing on effective or useful action. On the other hand, a quiet approach which avoids a public confrontation may often hold some hope of success. In this context, I hope that it may be possible to develop

further the procedure of quiet consultations among members of the Security Council on threatening situations, a process which I recently attempted to initiate over the situation in East Pakistan and the adjacent Indian States.

A development which was not foreseen when the Charter was written has become an important, and positive, element in discharging the political responsibilities of the Secretary-General. The establishment of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, which has vastly increased the day-to-day usefulness of the United Nations as an instrument of multilateral diplomacy, also gives the Secretary-General immediate and permanent access to highly skilled and experienced representatives of the Member Governments. In my view, this largely unpublicized development is one of the most important institutional advances of our first 25 years. It has greatly facilitated the political work of the Secretary-General, for it makes possible the discussion of the most sensitive problems in private and on impartial ground, where the Secretary-General and his senior colleagues are available, if required, as objective go-betweens and middlemen. The close relationships built up among the Permanent Representatives and the Secretary-General are an invaluable asset, especially in difficult times. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hundreds of devoted Permanent Representatives with whom I have been lucky enough to deal. They have made and will, I am sure, continue to make an incomparable contribution to the building of a reliable system of world order here in the United Nations.

I sometimes think that the drafters of the Charter were overly obsessed with political and military conflict. No doubt that obsession was justified in the situation prevailing at the time. In the world of today, it might be useful to add an Article 99(a) which would authorize the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of the membership global threats to human well-being other than those to peace and security. I have tried to do this, without specific authorization, in matters such as population growth or the environment. Some of these threats are now so grave and all-encompassing that they deserve a place of their own in our Charter. Much more could be done through the United Nations if its Members paid as much attention to relatively non-controversial, but nonetheless appalling, threats to humanity as they do to political conflicts which may become threats to the peace. The spirit and practice of international co-operation and solidarity might also be strengthened through such efforts.

Then there are the great humanitarian emergencies which the United Nations is still not equipped to meet. I am glad that steps are now being taken to fit the Organization to deal with natural disasters. The next step is to expand its capability to cover *un*natural disasters. The current situation in East Pakistan and the adjacent States of India has brought this necessity vividly to light. In an effort to do something about these immense disasters, I have, on my own initiative and without any supporting resolution from any United Nations organ, launched two relief operations which are concerned with millions of people and expenditures of hundreds of millions of dollars. I have felt that an initiative on my part was essential to fill the gap until more regular arrangements can be made, and that the Secretary-General's obligations under the Charter must include any humanitarian action that he can take to save the lives of large numbers of human beings. The political aspects of such situations, on the other hand, must obviously fall, as far as the United Nations is concerned, primarily within the competence of the Security Council.

There is one aspect of the role of the Secretary-General which is no less important for being fortuitous or for lacking any description in the Charter. I mention it at the end of 10 years service not in any spirit of rancour, but because I know it to be an important part of the Secretary-General's role. In a world of frustrated and short-sighted nationalism, where the super-Powers are armed against each other to a degree so suicidal as to seem insane to any reasonable person, a pretext is often necessary to avoid proceeding to the logical conclusion of national policies—or, to put it more crudely, there comes a time in the affairs of nations when it is eminently desirable to pass the buck. The United Nations as an organization is often an ideal recipient of the buck, and it follows that the Secretary-General can easily become a scapegoat in dangerous situations where no solution can be found.

These are by no means contemptible functions. I feel, however, and I have often said it before, that the peoples of the world should be very clear as to what is involved in this process. The process is a part of the character of the United Nations itself, of the way Governments use it and of the nature of the situations with which the Organization has to deal. The United Nations, lacking any attributes of sovereignty, must work by persuasion, argument, negotiation and a persistent search for consensus. For all the high ideals in the Charter, it is a very down-to-earth and pragmatic organization, which for the most part deals with hard political realities rather than with sweet reason or ideal aspirations. The opportunities for inspirational leadership or crusading are exceedingly rare. The Secretary-General must usually operate within these highly realistic limits if he is to achieve any useful results at all.

For the Governments of Member States, the United Nations is a place where responsibility can be shared or shifted—where concern can be publicly expressed and a valid formal reason for not taking unilateral action can be created. It is a place to which the moral demands of public opinion can be redirected when those demands become too oppressive for an individual Government to bear. It is a place where, behind the smoke-screen of exhaustive debate, positions can be gradually changed and faces saved. Working in private, the Secretary-General may play some useful part in this process, but his usefulness will usually vanish as soon as he proclaims it publicly.

Great problems usually come to the United Nations because Governments have been unable to think of anything else to do about them. This applies equally to the Middle East and to the environment. The United Nations is a last-ditch, hard-core affair, and it is not surprising that the Organization should often be blamed for failing to solve problems which have already been found to be insoluble by Governments. That is a part—admittedly a somewhat negative part—of the *raison d'être* of the United Nations. There is, I may add, no excuse for the Organization or the Secretary-General to give up the attempt to find solutions to apparently insoluble problems.

The Secretary-Generalship is at the same time an absorbing, a thrilling and a deeply frustrating task. No one who is lucky enough to be given the opportunities it offers has the right to complain of the difficulties. At the same time, the Secretary-General can never for a moment underestimate what is at stake. In matters relating to international peace and security, the Secretary-General's responsibility requires a continuous examination of the possibilities of effective action. In this examination, two simple considerations are ines-

capable. First, the Secretary-General must always be prepared to take an initiative, no matter what the consequences to his Office or to him personally may be, if he sincerely believes that it might mean the difference between peace and war. In such a situation, the personal prestige of a Secretary-General—and even the position of his Office—must be considered to be expendable. The second cardinal consideration must be the maintenance of the Secretary-General's independent position, as set out in Article 100 of the Charter, which alone can give him the freedom to act, without fear or favour, in the interests of world peace. Such an independence does not imply any disrespect for the wishes or opinions of Member Governments. On the contrary, his independence is an insurance that the Secretary-General will be able to serve, in full accordance with his oath of Office, the long-term interest in peace of *all* the Members of the Organization.

There is no easy way to discharge the duties of the Secretary-Generalship, but that does not detract from the immense privilege of being allowed to attempt the job. In my view, it is the most varied, most interesting and most challenging political job on earth. In one way, the Secretary-General is fortunate, for he is allowed to consider the problems of peace and war, the problems of the present and the future of mankind, from a position which is, and must be by its very nature, independent of national considerations. Impartiality, principle and objective truth are his strongest weapons. He is, and must be, at the same time a realist and a man of idealism and hope, with his mind more concentrated on a better future than preoccupied with a baneful past.

I feel strongly that my successor should be a man who will look to the future and to a global concept of the problems we all face. In our interdependent world, his continent or country of origin seems to me to be far less important than his integrity, his competence and his ability to look toward the future and to help make this Organization into a really effective instrument for peace, justice and progress. He should be impartial and objective without necessarily being neutral. He should be responsive to the movements and preoccupations of world public opinion and especially of young people, but he must also retain the confidence of the Member Governments, where, I need hardly say, the average age tends to be a good deal higher. He must have that political judgement, tact and integrity which the Preparatory Commission mentioned. He must also have an unassailable conviction of the importance of individual human dignity and value as a balance to the impersonal forces of national or group interests. He must have a sense of proportion and of humour to protect him against the bitterness of frustration and the discomfort of perennial, and sometimes unjustified, criticism. The Secretary-Generalship is not the most impossible job in the world, although it is certainly one of the most difficult. It is without any question one of the most rewarding.

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In his Report on the Work of the Organization, covering the period 16 June 1970 to 15 June 1971, the Secretary-General gave an account of the main activities of the United Nations. In the Introduction to this Report, issued separately on 19 September, U Thant made the following Concluding Remarks.

This year, after 10 years of service as Secretary-General, I shall briefly make a few general concluding remarks in this Introduction. Simple and obvious as most of them are, they express some of my own feelings at the end of my term.

The United Nations and the concept of internationalism as embodied in the Charter are sometimes viewed with less than enthusiasm, and even on occasion, with resentment by Governments. I am convinced more than ever, however, that it is a dangerous illusion to believe, in the present state of the world, that life can be safe without that concept and without a world organization which embodies it. Much of the usefulness of the United Nations is unknown and indeed intangible. But, however faulty, it represents an aspiration and a method of trying to realize a great ideal. Nations and peoples will turn their backs on this great endeavour at their gravest peril.

At this stage the United Nations system provides the best available and workable method by which nationalism and national sovereignty can evolve in order to keep pace with the vast changes that have made the nations of the world interdependent. If this evolution can succeed we may achieve a world concert of nations which preserves the best elements of nationalism. In a concert of nations where each plays its rightful part, the relations between States should at last be based on reality and fact, rather than on a conflicting ideology, prejudice and xenophobia. This simple hope may be said to be naïve and unrealistic, but how immensely productive and practical its realization would be in terms of the better use of our resources, our talents and our brief span of life on this planet!

If a genuine concert of nations could be achieved, the world Organization could at last become the instrument for harmonizing the policies and actions of States and the centre for joint enterprises on all those matters—and there is no shortage of them—which are of the deepest concern to human beings all over the world.

No one can deny that the performance of the political organs of the United Nations is disappointing, although great changes have taken place in the methods of operation both of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. The return to consensus in the Security Council has disadvantages as well as advantages, for it has often meant that when the Council cannot agree on an important question it may not even take up that question. Neither the Secretary-General nor any other organ can satisfactorily fill the gap created by the failure of the Security Council to comprehend the responsibilities given to it in the Charter. The primary function of our Organization—the maintenance of international peace and security—cannot be fulfilled by a retreat from collective security and collective responsibility into collective weakness and collective impotence.

It is unquestionably a step in the right direction that the General Assembly has broken out of its former preoccupation with cold war topics and now devotes most of its time to a vastly wider range of subjects, on which the voting is refreshingly unpredictable. It is, however, a weakness when resolutions are adopted which have no prospect of implementation, and the authority and prestige of the world's greatest deliberative body is thereby eroded.

Perhaps the most decisive change in the last 25 years is the change in the scale of world problems and the accelerating pace of that change. Developments in population, technology and damage to the environment have shown us what the authors of the Charter perhaps did not sufficiently appreciate, namely that scientific and technological advance is the most important single factor in bringing about changes not only in the lives of peoples, but also in the balance of power in the world. The United Nations as a global organization has a vital role to play in the control of the new breed of world-wide mass phenomena which we are now, almost helplessly, witnessing. A system of management of questions such our planet's vital resources, including air and water, is an urgent and long overdue necessity. Such questions can only be tackled effectively on a global scale. To curb the current waste of resources, including human time and energy, may also require a new and comprehensive look at the life style of the human race.

The world, for all its wealth, is still divided into rich and poor, and the gulf between them is growing. Just as the poorer nations are aspiring to technological and industrial progress, the richer ones are beginning to wonder whether they are not tired of affluence and frightened by some of its effects. The developing countries must be helped to develop and to avoid some of the worst consequences of development. A balance must be found which will at the same time meet their needs and avoid putting an impossible strain on the natural resources and on the life-sustaining systems of our planet.

I feel more strongly than ever the worth of the individual human being is the most unique and precious of all our assets and must be the beginning and the end of all our efforts. Governments, systems, ideologies and institutions come and go, but humanity remains. The nature and value of this most precious asset is increasingly appreciated as we see how empty organized life becomes when we remove or suppress the infinite variety and vitality of the individual.

In this connexion I feel obliged to mention a problem which has been almost daily in my mind during my time as Secretary-General. I refer to the violation of human rights within the frontiers of a State. Theoretically the United Nations has little standing in such situations—and they are all too common. Legally the membership of the United Nations has done an admirable job on human rights. The necessary texts exist. But practically where does an individual or a group of individuals find recourse against oppression within his own country? World public opinion has become an increasingly important factor in such problems. I myself have privately done the best I could in many such situations, knowing full well the weakness of my own position, and I know that many national leaders have done the same. But this can never be enough, and the time has surely come when Governments in the United Nations must make a determined effort to give justice a world-wide dimension.

A related problem which often confronts us and to which as yet no acceptable answer has been found in the provisions of the Charter, is the conflict between the principles of the integrity of sovereign States and the assertion of the

right to self-determination, and even secession, by a large group within a sovereign State. Here again, as in the case of human rights, a dangerous deadlock can paralyse the ability of the United Nations to help those involved.

I am increasingly persuaded that, whatever the size and strength of Governments or the awe-inspiring achievements of technology, we are more and more reliant for a decent future on the seriousness and responsibility of the individual citizens of the world. It is in the end their sense of decency and justice, their tolerance and human kindness, their talent and their will to live in peace that is our best hope for a just, orderly and creative society. Education in its broadest sense is the key to such a society, which will be supported and sustained not by the dominance of its rulers but by the character and wisdom of its citizens. Perhaps we have more to learn in this field than in any other.

These are a few random thoughts arising out of an absorbing 10 years of service to the community of nations. I have never been so convinced as now of the usefulness, the potential and the absolute necessity of the United Nations. The Organization is evolving, as all vital institutions must evolve, through a process of trial and error towards a goal and an ideal which all can accept. It is customary now for radicals to join with reactionaries in condemning the United Nations as an ineffective, outmoded and hypocritical instrument for peace and justice. What they would be able to put in its place is not clear. I too, like most of the Member Governments, am critical of much that goes on, or does not go on, in this house. But I am convinced that the institution itself is sound, and that it can, must and will be made to work.

In fact, after 10 years in office, my conviction stands undiminished that the United Nations remains the best instrument with which nations may co-operate for the development and the peace of their peoples. I have directed all my faith and efforts towards maintaining and developing this Organization as an indispensable centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of our common ends and as an increasingly effective instrument for peace and development.

For the duration of my tenure I have worked ceaselessly towards the goal of peace, justice and progress and, in whatever role life thereafter sets before me, I will continue to do so.

I cannot close without expressing my profound appreciation to the Member Governments which have given me such unfailing support and co-operation during these 10 years. I have received this co-operation at every level from the Head of State or Government through the Foreign Minister and the Permanent Representative and his colleagues. This support was displayed most notably in 1966, when I had announced my intention to accept a second term. At the present time, when there seems to be a feeling amongst many of the Member Governments that I should somehow be persuaded to accept a third term, I only wish that, apart from thanking them most sincerely for their continued confidence, I were in a position to accede to their wish. I much regret that this is not possible.

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